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Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Depression, Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified, Gen, Implied/Referenced Self-Harm, M/M, Mental Health Issues, Self-Hatred, Suicide, Will Byers Needs a Hug

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Summary:

When Will begins to act strange again, the boys band together and with the help of their science textbooks, try to find out what's wrong.

1. Page 151

Will Byers had many, many things to be angry about; from his father all the way to the mind-flayer, the thing that made him the angriest was himself. He hated the way his hair would flick up at the back and lead him to sitting on the edge of his bathtub every morning with his mom's hair straighteners tugging away at random curls that had formed through the night. He hated the way his body looked, not quite small, not quite big; just weird. He hated how he couldn't find the confidence to speak in class. He hated how he didn't like girls. He hated the scar on his stomach that he'd been given with a red-hot poker because he attacked his mom. He really just hated himself.

Any onlooker to the situation of Will's life could clearly see this in the way he acted, making himself seem small in the way he held himself, trying to look as 'normal' as he possibly could by wearing very basic outfits. Of course everyone noticed him, it was hard not to when you saw the way he contrasted in height when he walked with his friends, or the fact he had been plastered all over newspapers for the last few months of 1983. It was certainly hard to be 'normal' when your nickname was 'zombie boy', especially when you agreed with the cruel name yourself.

Though Will's older brother, Jonathan, had assured him that he'd much rather be friends with 'zombie boy' than anyone else, it still stung when people called him it. When a girl he'd never met before called him 'zombie boy' and then proceeded to ask him to dance, he had felt like running off and crying; and if Mike Wheeler hadn't pushed him to do it, he likely would've. It wasn't just a funny nickname that he didn't mind people using, it really hurt him, and it brought back terrifying memories of the past. It would be safe to say the rest of the smiles Will gave that night were completely faked.

After the night of prom, Will began to feel a deep pain from within himself; not the sort of pain that hurt for a while and then faded away, no, this was much more of a deep, exhausting ache that left him crying himself to sleep most nights and losing his appetite completely. Soon Will didn't even have the energy to feel angry about himself. He still attended school, though he was a ghost of his former

self; in his head he referred to himself as the ‘shadow monster’.

The only sort of interaction he could manage with his friends was occasional accidental eye contact, he didn’t speak to them, and they learned to stop trying to get him to talk; it was too exhausting.

It wasn’t as if the boys didn’t care about him, it was wholly the opposite, whenever he wasn’t with them they discussed how they could try and help him; though there wasn’t a great deal they *could* do. Whereas before they could’ve killed a monster that was chasing him or expel the evil that was possessing him, this time the problem wasn’t something physical, it was all mental.

Their time studying the human brain with Mr Clarke was largely learning about how it functioned in biological terms; however they had spent a good week on various topics in the area of mental health. From schizophrenia to post-traumatic stress disorder, they had learnt about it all, and most importantly; knew where to find all of the information in their text books.

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“Chapter 5, and that’s... page 151.” Dustin thought aloud as searched for the page number listing 50 of the most common mental disorders. Mike and Lucas sat on either side of Dustin, their own biology textbooks grasped in their hands as they flicked through to find the page.

“Got it.” Mike said with no particular enthusiasm, celebrating reaching a page first didn’t seem highly appropriate when it was a listing off terrifying things, one or two of which his best friend might be suffering from.

“Me too.” Lucas called out next, followed by Dustin who said “As have I.”

The atmosphere of the Wheeler basement, where many a thrilling adventure had taken place, was certainly tenser than usual, and not in the terms of entering a mysterious dungeon for the first time. Silently the boys scanned through each disorder, reading the little blurb attached to the usually complicated scientific name. They were

sorted into alphabetical order, so it wasn't long until each boy respectively landed on the one word that seemed to fit some of Will's symptoms the best.

'Depression' - a serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act.

A gloomy sigh came from each boy, with that came a dampened feeling of relief, at least now they could put a name to what Will Byers' brain was up to.

"This description is shit, I'll go to library before school tomorrow take out some books that can explain this more." Dustin explained, a tinge of sadness now plaguing his voice.

"Sounds like a good plan, god I hope there's something we can do, it really sucks seeing him down like this all the time." Said Lucas, who too didn't sound nearly as optimistic or chipper as usual.

Mike nodded, he felt like visiting Will at once.

"I'll try and talk to Will tonight, I'm sure Miss Byers would let me come in."

"That's a good idea, try and see if you can pick up on anything weird Will might be doing, specific things, there's usually little things that can help us better define what he's going through." Dustin replied, beginning to pack his things into his school bag so his mom wouldn't get suspicious.

Lucas did the same.

"I'll see you both tomorrow." Mike stood to see his friends out of the basement, their party felt incomplete without will; the whole situation was scarily reminiscent of the year before.

"Good luck with Will, send our love." Lucas said before he rode away.

"I'll try my best to find how to help him, Mike, it's going to be okay man." Dustin gave him a supportive pat on the back and then rode away himself.

Then Mike was alone, and god did he want to give Will Byers a hug.

2. Fascination of The Brain

Shivering in the December cold, Mike zipped up the front of his hoodie and knocked on the Byers' front door. He could here Joyce curse from inside and footsteps padding towards him, a tired looking face appeared.

"Mike?" Joyce asked, scepticism in her voice, "What are you doing here?"

"I know it's late, but Dustin, Lucas and I are really worried about Will, I was wondering if I'd be able to see him?" Joyce's face suddenly looked much more desperate than before, she hastily nodded and pushed the door open for Mike to come in.

"Good luck, he hasn't spoken to me all week." Joyce gave Mike a gentle push towards Will's room, as if he didn't know the way off by heart by now.

Walking down the wooden panelled corridor, little pieces of tape caught Mike's eye, he guessed they must've been the remanence of the map Will drew when he was possessed; Mike bit back bad memories and reached Will's bedroom door.

"Hey Will, can I come in?" Mike said with a raised voice, he wasn't competing over music or anything, though he knew sometimes if Will went into a trance it was hard to get him to respond unless you near-shouted.

"Yes." A small voice came from within the room, distant and solemn.

Pushing the door open, Mike prepared himself mentally; he already felt like this would be difficult.

Will was sat cross legged at the end of his bed, pyjama clad and messy haired. He looked thinner than Mike had ever seen him, it was frightening, the way his cheeks hollowed and eyes seemed to sink beneath blueish purple bags.

The sight really shocked Mike, Will had never looked quite so awful

when he was at school.

“Hey.” Mike managed without his voice cracking, he entered the room and sat beside Will on his bed, Will looked at him with a mixture of fear and confusion, though he didn’t speak a word to Mike’s greeting.

I was right then, this is going to be difficult, Mike thought to himself, continuing to take in the sight of his best friend.

“We all miss you.” Mike broke the tense silence, Will looked into his lap, guiltily. “It’s like you’re there but you’re not.”

Will nodded, he felt the same, though from his part, he didn’t have anything to say that anyone would care about so perhaps this was Mike telling him if he won’t speak he needs to leave them. It was no such thing.

“Is there anything I or we could do to help you?” Mike asked, he wasn’t going to reveal that they had researched mental disorders to try and scientifically discover how to help him; that would’ve made Will uncomfortable and that was the complete opposite of what Mike aimed to do.

“I-I don’t know...” Will turned to face Mike once again, now his eyes were filled with tears, Mike’s heart broke a little. “I feel so bad all the time- I just can’t feel anything but bad.” Will wiped away his tears with a sleeved arm.

“What sort of bad?” Mike tried to step around bringing up the ‘d-word’ as best as he could, until he could get a complete understanding with Will he vowed not to mention it once.

“It’s like, I hurt inside, but not like a physical pain, more like something really deep down that makes me feel really down, it won’t go away.” Will explains, it’s clearly not easy for him to talk about as his face carries a pained look.

“When do you think it started?” Mike asked, now curious, he didn’t want to further upset Will with questions; he was simply fascinated by the human brain.

"I think after the Snow Ball, not immediately, it's gotten worse." Will admitted, Mike nodded, remembering the Snow Ball.

There wasn't anything that leapt out at him that might've triggered Will into a deep sadness, the whole evening had been very uneventful for the boy. The only real situation of conflict had been the look in Will's eyes when the girl had asked him to dance, she had called him 'zombie boy', and Mike knew Will really hated that name. It just didn't seem enough to cause *this*.

"Maybe it's the anniversary effect? I know you said that was the case for Post-Traumatic Stress, so what if that's why this is happening?" Mike suggested, trying to remember all he could from Mr Clarke's teachings.

"I really don't know, Mike." Will sighed hopelessly, he wished he could be alone again, where no one was inspecting his mind and he could escape into dreamless sleep. Dreamless sleep was a very rare concept.

Mike gave Will a little space, stopping their conversation as he could see his friend becoming uncomfortable.

The silence was thick and awkward, Mike felt responsible.

"I'm sorry Will, I pushed you too far." Mike apologised, eyes filling with tears as he saw Will put his hands to his eyes to muffle sobs. He placed a careful arm around the shaking form of his best friend, noting how the boy's bones could be easily felt through a thick pyjama top.

Will cried into hands as Mike traced circles on his back, showing the best support he knew how; it was the way his own mother had when he was young.

"I promise we're going to find a way to help you." Mike pulled Will into a hug and let him cry into his shoulder, "I promise."

"T-thank you Mike." Will stammered as he pulled out of the hug, wiping his eyes of the fallen tears; thankfully no fresh ones were replacing them.

“I ought to be going, my mom doesn’t know where I am, I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?” Mike asked, the next day was a Friday, after that he could spend the whole weekend trying to help Will.

“Yeah, see you tomorrow.” Will waved goodbye and Mike left the room.

His spirits had risen a little, and although he knew that was nothing permanent, it made him feel *something*; that was a whole lot more than he had felt for the past month.

3. The 'S' Word

It was an early Friday morning and Dustin Henderson was pedalling through the quiet streets of Hawkins on his way to the library. It wasn't quite normal to see a thirteen year old boy stalking along the shelves of books in the non-fiction section at 7am, though many abnormal things happened in Hawkins so not even the librarian questioned it. Not until she saw exactly what Mr Henderson aimed to take out.

"Four books on mental disorders?" Marissa asked, it was unsurprising to see Dustin in library early in the morning, only a month ago he'd taken books out about reptiles, though this was certainly the strangest topic he'd chosen to study.

"It's for, um... a... science project!" Dustin lied, this time he didn't have to steal the 'paddles', though as a punishment he was only allowed to take out four books at a time.

"I see..." Marissa checked out each book before handing the stack back to Dustin, "Have a good day, Mr Henderson."

"You too!" Dustin didn't hang around, he was already out the door and stuffing the books into his backpack; he couldn't afford to be late to his first period, Mr Clarke was getting suspicious.

The bell rang as soon as Dustin had secured his bike into the bike-rack, he felt relief flood over himself. Before long he was sat at his usual desk in Science, Lucas beside him, Mike and Will behind him; Dustin made eye contact with all but the latter.

Since Will had been on his mind so much, Dustin had really tried to get a good look at his friend as he went to sit down. Just like Mike had the night before, Dustin was shocked by how sick Will looked.

He's so damn skinny, he thought to himself, noting the slightly dead look about Will's skin colour. This had certainly gotten out of control.

Mike had given him a look a slight success, so Dustin quickly put together that he had spoken with Will the night before.

Mr Clarke announced the subject of the day's lesson and the page in the textbook that they would find the information in, Dustin zipped open his bag and out fell the 4 books he had taken out of library.

"Shit!" Dustin cursed under his breath, he looked behind him and noticed Will's eyes had landed on the books. He shoved everything but his textbook back into his bag and hoped that Will hadn't processed the titles.

Of course, Will had, and whilst it had confused him a little, his mind was elsewhere. He was light-headed and dozy; feeling almost as if he could've still been asleep. Though perhaps that was because he hadn't eaten more than one meal for the entire week. His mother was trying her best to get him to act human, though even she was giving up. Will saw the way her eyes lost a glint of hope every time he pushed his plate away from him and walked to his room, or how she would sigh when trying to wake him and he would just turn away from her in his bed; he had even heard her speaking to Hopper for hours on the phone, sometimes just crying.

Will really wished he could act like a normal human being and give his poor mother a break, it really seemed like such a thing would never be possible; at least not with him around.

That was the first moment in his endless depressive period that Will thought about the 's' word.

Suicide.

4. Bathroom anxiety and something else

The school day proceeded uneventfully for the boys. Will was silent, Mike was worried, as were Dustin and Lucas; though worrying about Will wasn't exactly abnormal. Eventually the final bell rang, signifying the end of sixth period and class was dismissed. Will headed straight for the parking lot to wait for Jonathan, the boys had considered going after him, though they decided it would be best to discuss their findings before taking action.

"To my house!" Announced Mike, pretending to rev his handlebars like he was on a motorbike; Dustin rolled his eyes and Lucas chuckled.

They rode in almost complete silence, Mike's attempt at comedy hadn't sparked anything the remainder of the party. Everyone was just *too* busy worrying about Will.

Once in the Wheeler's basement, Dustin removed the library books from his bag and placed them at the D&D table (it was actually Ted's work bench, though because it was only used for their campaigns naming it so was only appropriate). Lucas and Mike pulled up the foldable chairs for themselves and Dustin took the armchair already at the table.

"I've only flicked through, so these could be completely useless." Dustin explained, opening one of them at the content page and tracing through with his index finger. "Mike, what happened with Will last night?"

Lucas took a book and began to search through whilst Mike retold the events of the night prior, remembering how lost and exhausted Will had looked.

"I felt terrible when he started crying, like I was prying in on something he really doesn't want to talk about." Mike recalled how when he had put an arm around his best-friend he could feel bones poking into his arm, "I think he's skipping meals a considerable

amount of the time, have you seen how freaking skinny he is? Like way more than usual!”

“Yeah, I’ve noticed.” Lucas replied, Dustin simply looked up and nodded.

Mike huffed and picked up one of Dustin’s library books for himself and started flicking through

Jonathan paced up and down the corridor, once or twice hovering outside of the bathroom where he brother had been crying for the past twenty minutes; he had no idea what to do, the door was locked.

When he had reached the house, Will had gotten out without a word and gone straight to the bathroom, Jonathan would be alone until five, a whole hour and a half later. He was beginning to panic.

Whilst it sounded morbid, the crying reassured him Will hadn’t passed out or done... something else. He had seen his little brother deteriorate over the past few months, he was always at the dinner table to see Will push away his plate, or awoken in the middle of the night by muffled weeping and then saw the blank expression of exhaustion on Will’s face the next morning. Whatever it was that Will was going through was affecting the whole family.

Their mom spent a lot of time sitting alone on the couch, smoking cigarette after cigarette; at first she was mourning over the loss of Bob Newby (something everyone involved in the events in October had done for a while), though now she was also acting as if Will was dead as well.

Jonathan suffered too, he spent lots of time with Nancy and Steve, trying to take his mind off not knowing how to help his brother. They were supportive to him, though with exam stress quickly building, everyone was too preoccupied with work to think about their own issues.

This brought Jonathan back to the matter at hand, his little brother locked in the bathroom, crying. He decided that if after five minutes

Will hadn't emerged, he would call Hopper; he always knew what to do.

"Okay, I've got some symptoms that match up quite well with what we think Will's got." Dustin said, spinning the book around so Lucas and Mike could inspect his findings. "So, the first thing that made me think that this is what Will has is 'feelings of guilt', we all know that he blames himself for his mom's boyfriend's death, so that's guilt. Then Mike, you said that Will felt an 'ache' in his chest, on both the physical symptoms list it says that an ache in the chest without any other connection could be a likely sign of depression. There are loads more, but the thing that really struck a chord was the 'loss of appetite', as Mike said earlier, we've all seen how skinny he is."

"But a 'loss of appetite' doesn't mean you just don't eat, it means that you have less of a desire to eat more than absolutely necessary." Lucas reasoned, Dustin scrunched up his face for a few seconds before suddenly swivelling the book around and quickly flipping through the pages.

"This did make me think of Will when I skipped past it before- where is it? Ah, got it." Dustin once again turned the book around. Mike and Lucas leaned in to read the page, they were confronted by block red capitals announcing the subject of the page.

EDNOS: Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified

Mike's eyes flicked over the warning signs, noting 'feeling cold most of the time', 'low energy' and 'rapid weight loss'. It was becoming more and more obvious that perhaps Will wasn't just suffering from a particularly nasty form of depression, he was also suffering from something else. Mike thought out loud:

"Shit."

It hadn't been three minutes when Jonathan gave in and grabbed the phone off the handset, dialling the number he knew Hopper would

respond to. After a few rings the chief picked up.

“Hello, Jim Hopper, Hawkins Chief of Police.”

“Hey Hop, it’s Jonathan Byers.”

“Oh hey kid, everything okay?”

“I need your help.”

“What with?”

“Will’s locked himself in the bathroom and I can’t hear anything.”

“I’ll be right over.”

5. The Curiosity Door

Not ten minutes later Hopper's Chevrolet K5 Blazer pulled up in the Byers' drive, Jonathan let him in straight away and led him to the locked bathroom door.

"Hey kid, open up." Hopper said, knocking on the door with the back of his fist.

Silence.

"Kid, your brother is worried sick, open the goddamn door." Now in a clearly more concerned state, Hopper tried to open the door; of course to no avail. "Jesus Christ.... Jon, I think we're going to have to break down the door."

"There's no other way?" Jonathan questioned, he felt sick, Will could be having an episode, or a seizure or he might've even- *no*, he thought to himself, *don't think like that*.

A frantic banging on the front door made the Chief and Jonathan jump.

"Who?" Hopper started, making his way to the front door.

"I don't know"

"Jonathan? Mrs Byers? Please let us in we really need to talk to Will!" The voice of a nervous Dustin Henderson called out.

Confused, Hopper opened the door.

"Hopper? What are you doing here?" Mike Wheeler, who was at Dustin's side questioned. Lucas who was also there gave the chief his trademark suspicious look.

"I might ask you quite the same, however it's really *not* a good time." Hopper tried to argue, though the three boys pushed past, determined.

"Why? Where's Will?" Lucas spoke up. The boys turned to a guilty

looking Jonathan and Hopper as a feeling of dread settled in the pits on their stomachs.

Hopper and Jonathan made eye-contact and then nodded.

“Where the hell is Will?” An impatient Mike demanded.

“We think he’s in the bathroom.” Jonathan bit his lower lip, running all the awful things that could be happening behind the locked door.

The boy’s now all bore suspicious expressions in varying levels of concern.

“You think?” Said Dustin.

“Well, the door is locked and I’ve checked the window from outside, it’s locked closed. So, yeah he’s in the bathroom.” Jonathan explained, palms sweating with his high levels of anxiety, he felt close to tears.

Mike sighed and walked quickly to the bathroom door. “Will, if you’re in there please say something, please.” He felt a wave of nausea and dread pull over himself.

Hopper joined him at the door, “Help me bash a hole next to the handle, then I can reach in and unlock it, okay?” He addressed the group.

They quickly obliged, Dustin found a candle stick on the dinner table and handed it the Chief, he thanked the kid and quickly made a hole in the thin wood panels that made the door; he tried not to break it beyond repair, Joyce had had to fix her house too often, he’d fix this one for her.

He couldn’t fit his hand through the door, so Mike snaked his thin wrist inside and twisted the key in the lock, the door swung open at a push.

They piled in the room, all wordlessly staring at what they could see. No one could comprehend quite what they were looking at, not until a minutes later when Joyce had come home and pushed through the crowd of males in a panic; then the hysteria began.

Joyce screamed, rushing to the bathtub where her son lay unconscious, wearing nothing but his underwear. His head was drooped in a fashion that printed a sick image in everyone's mind, quickly the room became a mess. Hopper was at Joyce's side trying to find a pulse *anywhere* on Will, Mike fled the room and curled into a ball in the corner of Will's bedroom, Jonathan bent down to pick up an empty bottle of his mother's anxiety medication, Dustin and Lucas walked out of the room and sat down on the couch, wordlessly staring at each other with floods of tears spilling down their faces.

Jonathan quickly came to Joyce and Hopper with the empty bottle, he couldn't cry, he couldn't speak, all he could do was stare at the lifeless body of his little brother.

Hopper stopped trying to find a pulse suddenly, Joyce screamed at him to continue, though he quickly pushed Jonathan and Joyce out of the room and told them to call an ambulance.

He wouldn't let Will die, even if he had to beat the life back into him.

Hopper had found a pulse, that was all Joyce could think, she sat on the floor outside the bathroom as somewhere in the house Jonathan was screaming down the phone, Dustin and Lucas were crying and hugging each other and Mike was screaming, sounding deeply in pain; she could only focus on the dull thuds coming from the bathroom, combined with the exhausted breaths of Jim Hopper.

Then one muffled noise made her heart stop for so long that she could've died; her son gagging.

She couldn't stop herself from rushing into the room, only to see Hopper holding Will's tiny body over the toilet as he forced his finger down Will's throat and made him throw up half a bottle of pills.

Hopper had been within minutes of completely losing Will, if he hadn't been trained to deal with such a situation (among many others) they definitely wouldn't be riding home with the youngest

member of the Byers' family sitting silently in the back of the car.

Will had to have his stomach pumped to remove the remaining pills, it had been unbearable to watch for even the Chief, so he stayed in the hospital waiting room with three kids, one teen and one traumatized mother. No one spoke, just thought and swept away rogue tears; the image of a dead boy in the bathtub burned into their retinas.

Half an hour of silence later, a nurse called for Hopper only. Had it been any other situation, Joyce would've argued that she should most definitely come too, though she was far too emotionally drained to even look disappointed to not see her boy.

"He's alive, Hop, but barely." The nurse explained to him, guiding him to a different room than he'd been in before. The unit was labelled 'Intensive Care', Hopper felt a part of himself sigh deeply.

"What sort of state is he in?" The question had burned in his head since he left the waiting room.

"Poor, he'll have to stay for a while, at longest a week. We've already notified Doctor Owens, who I am aware that you're familiar with, he heard that Will was in and he is waiting in the boy's room to speak with you. He specified only you, which is why Mrs Byers has not been allowed to come, I will allow her to come as soon as you and Sam have spoken, is that okay?"

"Yeah, that's fine." Hopper was surprised how familiar the nurse was with him, though with the way she referred to Sam Owens in a first name basis, Hop guessed they worked together.

A wooden door with a removable label reading 'WILLIAM BYERS' was pushed open by the nurse, who then made herself scarce.

"Hop." Sam stood from the chair beside Will's bed to greet the Chief. "Well done saving him, I heard it was just in time."

"I couldn't let him die, if I could save him, I would save him." Hopper offered as an explanation, "You wanted to speak?"

"Yes." Sam led Hopper out of the room and across the corridor where

an office bearing the doctor's name was. "Please come in, take a seat."

Hopper did so.

"I'll get straight to the point as I know we're keeping many people, including yourself, from seeing Mr. Byers. Quite frankly, I want to help him, I know he's been suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress, though a very desperate mom called me a week ago, unbeknownst to you I believe, she described his symptoms of that of someone suffering from chronic depression and some signs of disordered eating; and well, as we've seen today with his attempted suicide, I think he really needs a medical professional to help him."

Hopper agreed without hesitation, it was an obvious statement that he had never considered himself.

"That's where I come in. You know I'm not working at this hospital, I now work at the psychiatric ward over in Chicago, and before you panic about it being all the way over in Chicago, don't worry, I'm going to be offering weekly check-ups on Will, I don't mind if they're done here or at his house, I just want to give him some real help. I think it's the least I can do to compensate everything that the Lab's mistake did to harm him." Sam bowed his head in shame, the thought of Dr Brenner, his predecessor just made him shiver. "I'm not saying you have to decide straight away, and I told you rather than Joyce because I know she's not trusting of me, but try and talk to her and Will about it as he recovers. Okay?"

Hop thought for a minute or two before answering, "We'll talk about it, I think it's a good idea, but Joyce and Will need to have a say in it too."

"Of course." Sam checked his watch, "Right, good talk, I need to be off and I'm presuming you're wanting to see Will now, I trust you know your way."

Hopper nodded and left the room, heading for the door printed with Will's name.

6. Reflection and Contemplation

The car journey home from the hospital was silent, just like the past four days had been. Between wiping tears and barely speaking in hushed tones, it had been a time for reflection and contemplation.

Will, was wedged in the back of the Byers' Ford Pinto, between his mother and Mike (who had insisted on staying by Will's side for the entire hospital stay). To say the youngest Byers hadn't spoken wouldn't be an overstatement, he *could* talk, though he chose to communicate in nods of his head rather than engaging his vocal chords; it just didn't feel right for him to speak, he had never wanted to speak again when he swallowed a bottle of pills. He wasn't ready to discuss or explain yet, that would be far too draining for him to even consider for a while; he had shaken his head at the offer of therapy from the school, though he didn't answer to check-ups from Doctor Owens, that he would consider further.

Mike, who was so glad to have Will alive, didn't much show it in his sullen expression. Though Will *had* been off in his behaviours for the past few months, the day they found him in the bathroom, Mike had felt there was something new in the behaviour. He just tried not to blame himself for not bringing it up and possibly saving the whole disaster from happening. He realised how much he valued Will over the whole ordeal, he took Will's hand, cold and frail into his own, squeezing not too tight; just tight enough to hopefully restore hope in them both. Will didn't look up from his fixed glaze in his lap, although his stare became momentarily softer. Mike smiled, that was enough for him.

Joyce had not had an easy time at all. While she watched her boy sleep in his hospital bed, morbidly the very same he had been in on his instant hospitalisation after the Upside Down, she couldn't help notice things she hadn't before; things that broke her heart even more, if that was possible.

It was how tiny Will looked in his hospital gown, the way his shoulder and collar bones jutted out against the patterned fabric, the tiny red lines that peeped from under short sleeves, indicating that her boy had been hurting himself in ways she had no idea about. It

frequently became too much and she would politely excuse herself from the hospital room; headed either for the parking lot to smoke or just to wander in the corridors until she got lost and had to find her way back using the map on the walls.

She looked at her son and watched as his best friend took one of his hands and held it with so much care that she felt her eye's well up with tears for the umpteenth time. Joyce looked at Mike and saw the worry in his eyes, he caught her gaze so she gave him a soft smile and whispered "Thank you."

The house was covered in the aftermath as usual, Jonathan told the passengers in the back to wait for a minute or too whilst he and Hopper (who had been riding shotgun) cleared up the mess in and around the bathroom. Jonathan tried to keep together as he retrieved both Will's discarded clothes and the empty pill bottle from the bathroom, though as Hopper put a supportive hand on his shoulder, Jonathan cracked. He couldn't stop himself as hot, heavy tears streamed down his face, he clutched the clothes in his chest, Hopper quickly took away the pill bottle and threw it in the trash; he'd be installing a lock on the medicine cabinet while he was fixing the door.

Hop felt ill, but he was good at keeping himself together, so got the crumpled mess of Jonathan to his feet and brought him to the tatty couch in the lounge; wrapping a knitted blanket around his shoulders.

"I'm going to get the others, everything's going to be okay, I promise. Jonathan, I promise you, everything is going to be okay." Jonathan nodded, while he didn't much feel it, he did feel like Hopper would never lie to him about such a thing; it gave him a slight bit of hope.

Will needed to be supported by someone when he walked due to his weak state, so as they would when Mike found him after an episode, Mike clutched Will around the shoulders and let him put what little weight he had against him. It helped that Mike was so tall.

Seated next to his big brother, Will couldn't think of anything but guilt.

Could he ever give his friends or family a break?

7. Recovery

Recovery was a foreign word for Will, he never seemed to get any better unless he was helped with it, and being helped couldn't start until he admitted to himself that he *needed* help. For about a week after his little accident in the bathroom, Will thought about how nice it would be if he could be happy again. Once his medicine fuelled daze was over, he realised that being happy was a very possible concept; so he agreed to having Doctor Owens be his "therapist" and he started trying to do more things that had made him happy in the past.

Mike was more than willing to help Will with doing things that made him happy, he would take Will one little outings (that he liked to refer to as dates, but certainly not out loud or in front of Will), they would go to the milkshake parlour, or to the play area where they had first met. Sometimes they would just stay in Mike's basement, Will drawing whatever his creative mind came up with and Mike watching, usually in awe at how talented the boy was.

Recovery was slow, Will had his bad days when he'd stay under his duvet covers and not go to school, or he'd find himself in the bathtub dreaming of cracking open his brother's razor and being successful in his attempt; though whenever he felt like that, his family would try and help him. Either Joyce or Jonathan would take the day off and they'd dedicate the whole time to trying to make Will smile. It worked most of the time and it was always appreciated.

Therapy with Doctor "call me Sam" Owens was a lot less daunting than Will had thought it might be. They did it in the hospital because Will felt there he didn't have anything to distract himself from telling the truth. He was a little afraid at first when Sam had said that they would have to keep track of his weight and if he tried to harm himself in anyway, he felt like he was not in control, though even that was starting to become less frightening. He almost felt proud when the number in the scale was starting to become more normal; Mike's milkshake dates were probably to blame for that.

Dustin and Lucas were there for Will too, though they spent a lot of their time fighting over Max, they always made sure Will was okay

and took him out of any situations that made him uncomfortable. They also always knew how to make Will laugh, that was good.

By New Year's Eve, Will and Mike were really close, they would sometimes stare into each other's eyes for a long time without saying anything but supportive whispers; it wasn't a surprise to anyone when the countdown to 1985 ended and the boy's sharing their first kiss.

Mike made sure Will was treated exactly how he should be, always holding his hand or packing an extra jumper and scarf when they went on walks, just in case Will got cold. It became rare to see either Mike without Will or Will without Mike. Dustin and Lucas thought it was sweet, but rolled their eyes regardless, Max decided that she much preferred a certain telekinetic girl over the both of them; so love wasn't a topic either of them much liked any more.

Things were looking a lot more right-side up for William Byers, and that was good.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you to everyone who has read and left support on this story, it is all so greatly appreciated! I hope you've enjoyed my depressing ramblings x